

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

WAHLBERG'S EAGLE NESTING IN ETHIOPIA On my arrival in Addis Ababa in mid June 1974, a pair of Wahlberg's Eagles *Aquila wahlbergi* was already in residence on the compound of the British Embassy, which comprises almost 33 ha of gardens, woods and paddocks on the hills to the northeast of the city at an altitude of about 2500 m a.s.l. The then Ambassador, Mr Willie Morris, told me that the birds had also been present the previous year.

In late June, the presumed male was, on several occasions, heard to utter a loud yelping laugh of 5-6 notes from a prominent perch in the compound. No aerial display was observed, but my visits to the site were irregular (once every two or three days on average) and these often coincided with the rainstorms which occur with increasing frequency from June to October. During July only one bird was in evidence, although individuals were seen at widely separated points in the city on four occasions. During August much of my time was spent outside Addis but single birds were seen on four occasions on the compound and once in the city.

The nest, which was a medium-sized structure in a fork about 15 m up in a large *Eucalyptus globulus*, was not located until September. The male was twice seen carrying sticks to the nest in mid-month. On each approach to the incubating female it uttered the diagnostic 'kip' call, repeated up to four times. On 24 September, with the female sitting, the male circled overhead calling loudly and repeatedly - a single strident syllable. The chick was first seen on 2 October, when it was covered in a brownish down. By mid-October it was looking quite sturdy and was climbing about in the nest. Unfortunately I had to leave Addis at the end of October and was unable to follow the saga through. When I returned to the city in January 1975 there was no sign of an immature bird in the vicinity of the compound, but two adults were present on 5 February, when the yelping display call was again heard. The pair was still present in June, when I left Addis for good. On 7 March 1975 a pair was performing typical *Aquila* aerial evolutions over the Jimma road, at the western edge of the city, and in early June another pair at the same locality included a pale-phase bird.

The prey of the Embassy compound pair seemed to consist mainly of small/medium to medium-sized birds, many of which were caught within the compound itself. Although I never saw a kill myself there were eye-witness reports of 'pigeons' being taken (probably either Pink-breasted Doves *Streptopelia lugens* or the endemic White-collared Pigeons *Columba albitorques*, both of which were common on the compound). I did on one occasion see one of the pair stoop from near the nest at an Olive Thrush *Turdus abyssinicus* which was perched in the lower branches of a densely-foliaged tree. The eagle displayed remarkable agility in the ensuing pursuit through a stand of trees, but finally lost its quarry. The slower-flying Groundscraper Thrushes *T. litsipsirupa*, which were regular visitors to the compound, would have provided easier prey. On 14 October 1974 the male brought a lizard of about 20 - 25 cm to the nest.

As the status of Wahlberg's Eagle is described as 'uncertain' by Urban & Brown 1971 (*A checklist of the birds of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press) the following observations of adults outside the Addis Ababa area are also of interest:

2 over hill scrub on the edge of the rift valley escarpment between Kombolcha and Bati (east of Dessie) on 13 July 1974.

1 over the Menegesha Forest on 1 March 1975

1 in the Awash National Park on 28 March 1975.

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WAHLBERG'S EAGLE IN NORTHEASTERN AFRICA AND THE FIRST RECORD FOR SOMALIA *Aquila wahlbergi* has been generally considered a trans-equatorial migrant breeding mainly south of the equator and wintering in unknown localities, possibly in the south Sudan (Brown 1970, Steyn 1973). Recently, however, it has been recorded quite commonly from Ethiopia during the season (August to January) when it is breeding in Kenya and further south, and has been recorded breeding in Addis Ababa (Vittery 1978). In East Africa and southern Africa it is a bird of *Combretum* or *Acacia* savannas, but the nest described by Vittery was at over 2500 m a.s.l. in eucalyptus at the edge of a large town, a habitat entirely different from the normal East African one. Several other nests have been reported in Addis (Simkin, pers. comm.) and elsewhere in Ethiopia, but details have not been recorded.

Urban & Brown (1971) regarded the occurrence of Wahlberg's Eagle in Ethiopia as uncertain, though it had been recorded from the Awash Park. In 1975 I saw two in Tigray Region, one in the Giba River Valley about 30 km west of Makelle, the other in farmland near Dugum. Both were in typical habitat of *Acacia-Combretum* savanna and both could have been breeding in the area in October - November. In 1975 the nest in the Embassy compound at Addis Ababa was unoccupied; it had reared a young bird successfully in 1974, and probably on other occasions, but there was no sign of activity in January 1976 (Vittery 1978, pers. obs.).

Addis Ababa is approximately 9°N. and the localities mentioned in Tigray between 13° and 14°N., so that if, in fact, these eagles were breeding in the latter locality, they would be the furthest north breeding records for the species. There are other records, from Zaria, Nigeria (P. Ward, pers. comm.) in June, but there is the possibility that identity may have been confused in this case. However, it appears that Wahlberg's Eagle may be a not uncommon breeder north of the equator.

According to Archer & Godman (1937) Wahlberg's Eagle is not recorded from Somalia. Nevertheless, while in detention at Hargeisa during February 1977 I several times saw an undoubted example of this species soaring over the Hargeisa Club, which is situated in a strip of *Acacia tortilis* woodland bordering a dry river bed (a typical site for a breeding pair). There could be no reasonable doubt of its identity as, on more than one occasion, I could compare it in the air with Tawny Eagles *A. rapax*, and once with what was almost certainly a Lesser Spotted Eagle *A. pomarina*, which would also be a new record for Somalia.

Whether Wahlberg's Eagle has always been present in these localities but never noticed or collected, or whether it is changing its habits and becoming more common as a breeding bird in the northern tropics, is obscure. The case seems analogous to the recent re-discovery of the Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* as a breeding bird in Cape Province, South Africa, after being overlooked for many years.